

STRATEG EAST
STATE & IT
EURASIAN FORUM
BAKU, 4-5 NOVEMBER 2025

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Strategieast STATE & IT EURASIAN FORUM

BAKU, 4-5 NOVEMBER 2025



MINISTRY OF DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT
AND TRANSPORT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN



Innovation and Digital
Development Agency



European Bank
for Reconstruction and Development



Partners



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Since its foundation in 2017, StrategEast has remained committed to advancing a knowledge-driven economy throughout the countries of Eurasia. Over the years, this mission has evolved into a comprehensive framework built on five key educational pillars that were once again

highlighted during the StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum in Azerbaijan.

First, StrategEast has consistently focused on educating people—providing individuals across the region with the skills, digital literacy, and competencies required to participate in and benefit from a modern technological economy.

Second, the organization has placed great emphasis on educating companies. In an increasingly competitive digital landscape, businesses must adapt to rapidly changing technologies and market expectations. Through its programs and partnerships, StrategEast has helped companies transition toward more efficient, innovative, and globally aligned models of operation.

Third, StrategEast has worked to educate capital. One of the Forum's central themes was the transformation of traditional financial resources into smart capital capable of supporting high-growth industries, early-stage innovations, and a new generation of tech entrepreneurs.

Fourth, the Forum underscored StrategEast's ongoing efforts to educate governments. Aligning national legislation with international standards, supporting regulatory reforms, and encouraging transparent digital governance have become essential components of the region's long-term development. These issues were widely discussed during the sessions in Baku.

Finally, StrategEast continues to educate global markets. A recurring message throughout the Forum was that Eurasia is no longer merely a consumer of global digital services. Increasingly, it is becoming a source of advanced technological expertise, competitive talent, and breakthrough innovation. This message is now being communicated not only to partners in the United States and Europe, but also to the rapidly growing digital economies of the Gulf.

Across multiple sessions, speakers emphasized that a knowledge-driven economy is not only a foundation for sustained economic growth—it also creates societies grounded in equal opportunity, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. Such an economy strengthens internal connections within Eurasia and deepens the region's integration into global value chains.

The StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum has traditionally been held in one of Eurasia's emerging IT capitals: Kyiv, Tbilisi, Bishkek, Samarkand, Almaty, and Chişinău have each hosted previous editions. **In 2025, the Forum took place in Azerbaijan**, reinforcing the country's expanding role in shaping the digital transformation of the region. The discussions and outcomes demonstrated that Azerbaijan is well-positioned to become one of Eurasia's leading hubs for innovation, technology, and AI-driven development.

StrategEast expressed its gratitude to the Forum's partners—the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Innovations and Digital Development Agency, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Google, EPAM, Ernst & Young, and Pasha Holding—whose support ensured the event's successful implementation.

The central theme of the 2025 Forum, **"Shaping the World with AI,"** resonated throughout the panels and discussions. While previous industrial revolutions were driven by energy resources, participants shared a strong belief that in the decades ahead, **knowledge will become the new energy**, and the IT sector will serve as the new engine powering Azerbaijan's and Eurasia's economies. The conversations in Baku reflected a shared understanding that artificial intelligence is rapidly redefining global economic models—and that Eurasia must be an active contributor to this transformation, not a passive observer.

**Anatoly Motkin,
President, StrategEast**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anatoly Motkin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Policy Recommendations Based on the StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum 2025

1. Build Regional AI and Digital Infrastructure Through Joint Investment

Shared GPU clusters, regional data centers, cloud architecture and AI Excellence Centers form the backbone of digital sovereignty. Without foundational infrastructure, no nation can deploy advanced AI systems or support competitive private-sector innovation.

2. Build Human Capital and Cyber-Resilience as Pillars of Digital Transformation

Competitiveness in the AI era depends on a skilled workforce and strong cybersecurity. Governments must invest in digital literacy, AI education, cybersecurity training, and continuous upskilling for public servants, youth, and SMEs.

3. Develop Local Language Models While Ensuring Global Interoperability

National LLMs/SLMs tailored for health, education, agriculture and public services are crucial for sovereignty. Yet they must remain interoperable with global architectures to ensure safety, performance, and compatibility with international partners.

4. Strengthen Public-Sector AI Literacy and Establish Cross-Ministerial Governance

AI transformation requires unified governance: inter-ministerial AI councils, data governance bodies, and systematic AI education for civil servants. Harmonized governance prevents siloed initiatives and accelerates national deployment.

5. Make AI a Flagship National Priority Led Directly by Heads of State

Presidents and prime ministers should personally champion national AI strategies, elevate AI to a top political agenda, and ensure alignment across ministries, investors, and global partners. High-level political will is essential for ambitious reform.

6. Strengthen International Public Advocacy to Position "Eurasia" as a New Global AI and Tech Center

Governments must actively promote the region in global forums, highlight success stories, and coordinate messaging to brand Eurasia as a rising hub of digital and AI-driven innovation. Visibility directly determines investment and partnership flows.

7. Adopt a Two-Phase AI Regulatory Path Aligned With the EU AI Act

The first phase should rely on soft-law tools: voluntary standards, risk assessments and sandbox experimentation. The second phase should gradually align national frameworks with the EU AI Act, ensuring both innovation and regulatory readiness.

8. Expand Regional Sandboxes and Public-Private R&D Partnerships

Cross-border sandboxes provide controlled environments to test AI systems, data flows, and compliance mechanisms. Partnerships with OpenAI, Google, Meta, Nvidia and others enable responsible scaling and accelerate adoption.

9. Connect IT Parks, AI Hubs, and Startup Ecosystems Across Borders

Interlinked regional hubs create a multi-country innovation zone. Shared R&D programs, talent mobility, joint acceleration and co-development make the region more attractive to global investors and Big Tech partners.

10. Promote a Gulf-Central Asia Digital Corridor and Joint Innovation Programs

A coordinated Digital Corridor with the GCC — covering cloud standards, secure data flows, and AI interoperability — would merge Gulf capital and Central Asian talent into a shared innovation engine strengthened by joint R&D hubs.

Key speakers



| Yury Antaniuk, VP, GovTech & Public Services, Epam Systems

“When it comes to digital government services, Azerbaijan is in a strong position. Many neighboring countries have already introduced online and mobile services, and Azerbaijan is among the successful examples — citizens can use digital documents, register vehicles, and access a wide range of e-services. However, when we talk about building a knowledge economy, simply digitizing services is not enough. A true knowledge economy requires preparing citizens for a new reality, especially as AI increasingly transforms daily life. This goes far beyond moving paper-based procedures to a website or mobile app.

Globally, strong examples of knowledge-based public services are still limited, though countries like Singapore and Estonia are beginning to demonstrate how government digital tools can help people not only complete routine tasks but also improve their lives. One promising direction — also relevant for Azerbaijan — is expanding access to high-quality online education, and Azerbaijan already has several strong courses available.”



| Alkis Drakinos, Director, Regional Head Caucasus, EBRD

“Artificial intelligence and digital transformation are already reshaping the way we live, work, and connect. These are no longer distant concepts — they are actively defining our economies and our societies today. This year’s Forum theme, “Shaping the World with AI,” could not be more relevant for our region. AI brings both tremendous opportunity and significant responsibility. It offers the potential for our countries to leap forward in the global economy. But to realize these benefits, the Caucasus — and Azerbaijan in particular—must fully embrace its role and claim the position it deserves on the world stage. This is precisely where collaboration becomes essential.”



| Vera Ignatyeva, Customer Success Director, EMEA, Coursera

“Each year we publish a Job Skills Report that tracks where learners are enrolling and which skills are most in demand. Three major trends stand out. First, there is a strong surge of interest in generative AI, machine learning, and related technologies. Second, we see growing demand for data ethics, governance, data protection, and risk management —skills that are becoming essential across sectors. And third, a newer trend this year is the rise of business and human skills, especially within the public sector. Civil servants, for example, are not only upskilling in AI but also in data analytics for smarter, more transparent policymaking, as well as safe and responsible data use. As a result, governments and companies are increasingly launching integrated programs in data literacy, AI literacy, and cyber literacy.”



| Salar Imamaliyev, Chief Commercial Officer, Innovation and Digital Development Agency

“Artificial intelligence is more than a technology — it will reshape economies, industries, and public governance worldwide. Earlier this year, the government approved the National AI Strategy (2025–2028), a comprehensive roadmap to build a sustainable AI ecosystem focused on infrastructure, human capital, and inclusive economic benefits. To support implementation, we have completed international market analysis, aligned our evaluation methodologies with global standards, and harmonized digital governance across public institutions — four standards are already in use.”



Tughra Musayeva, Head of Innovations, PASHA Holding

"The focus of discussion today is shifting from what AI can do to how we can integrate it in an inclusive and responsible way. There was an assumption that AI would bring more equality, but in reality it is also creating new disparities. Companies and countries that adopt AI early are gaining a competitive edge, while those that lag behind are losing momentum."



Rika Nakazawa, Chief Commercial Innovation, NTT

"I believe that for Azerbaijan, the key is to fully leverage the resources and advantages you already have to accelerate progress. It's also fundamentally about talent. Traditionally, new talent entering the workforce required guidance from senior executives. Today, however, we are increasingly witnessing two-way mentoring, where AI-native young professionals bring valuable expertise that senior leaders can also learn from. This dynamic is becoming essential as AI rapidly reshapes the types of jobs and skills that will define the future economy."

Ultimately, speaking as someone from the Eurasian region, my message to Azerbaijan is about finding the right balance and being prepared to pivot effectively. The country stands at a greenfield opportunity, and the ability to navigate this pivotal moment will determine how successfully Azerbaijan positions itself in the emerging AI-driven landscape."



Steffi Stallmeister, Country Manager for Azerbaijan, Europe and Central Asia, ECA, World Bank

"Digitalization can strengthen transparency, citizen engagement, and accelerate economic growth. But it is equally critical to ensure that the digital divide does not widen. Not everyone needs to become a data scientist, but everyone must have sufficient digital literacy to participate in the digital economy and avoid losing out on new opportunities."

In terms of governance, digitalization offers three key improvements. First, it expands access to information. Second, it enhances accountability through greater transparency and active citizen feedback. Third, it streamlines processes and reduces bureaucratic burdens, making government services more efficient and responsive."



Marina Zhunich, Head of Government Affairs and Public Policy at Google Cloud in Caucasus, Central Asia, South Africa, and Israel

"I appreciate the real progress we're already seeing with AI — increasing security, improving citizen services, and reducing unnecessary paperwork and frontline interactions. But to fully unlock AI's potential for digital government, strong and forward-looking regulation is essential. At Google, we take a holistic approach and work with governments worldwide to enable digital transformation. This requires several key pillars: secure and modern infrastructure, investment in human capital, and policies that keep pace with technological change. The global skills gap remains one of the biggest barriers to designing, deploying, and maintaining AI responsibly."

Keynote speech | Architecting the Impossible: Building the Imagination Economy



Catherine Connors, Co-founder of StoryQuo; futurist, media innovator and narrative architect

"We often talk about the Third, Fourth, or even Fifth Industrial Revolution, but in reality, we've already moved far beyond the traditional industrial framework — we just haven't created a new narrative to describe where we are now. For centuries, humanity focused on material production. Today, innovation is driven less by materials and more by ideas, creativity, and intelligence.

This moment demands a shift: from extraction to imagination, from building with materials to building

with vision, from manufacturing-based economies to economies powered by creativity and possibility. We must name what we are already doing: imagining, visualizing, and designing the impossible. Industry will remain important, but we need a forward-looking narrative that reflects how our methods of creating, innovating, and living are transforming. Whether we call it the imagination revolution, the intelligence revolution, or something else entirely, one thing is clear: the driving force of the new era is imagination."

Panel discussion | Global IT Trends 2025: Navigating the AI Economy



Kirill Sorokin, Consulting Partner, EY Azerbaijan

“When it comes to competitiveness in AI today, we’re seeing a global shift. Until recently, success was often measured by a company’s size, access to capital, or government ties. But those indicators matter far less now. The real measure of competitiveness in AI is how fast an organization can learn — especially from its own mistakes. The failures of the 90% that fall behind offer valuable lessons about what not to do and where new opportunities might lie. Right now, the most competitive players in AI are those who learn the fastest and operate the most efficiently. And efficiency is not only about sustainability — it’s about the very real cost of running AI models, which consume enormous amounts of electricity. In many ways, success comes down to innovation speed and the lowest power bill.”

Amy Peck, Founder&CEO, EndeavorXR

“When we talk about responsible AI, the first question on everyone’s mind is how to deploy this technology ethically and safely. Beyond the current buzzwords — agentic AI, AI at the edge, and many other — the most meaningful applications will vary from company to company. The essential starting point is to establish strong AI governance structures within the organization. The next critical element is data. Companies sit on vast archives of historical data while also generating large volumes of dynamic, real-time data. It is crucial to ensure that these data assets are properly structured, cleaned, and ready to be integrated into future business workflows. And when we talk about the future of business, it’s not only about immediate AI implementation for productivity gains — although we know that many AI tools, especially LLMs, can be deployed right away to boost efficiency. The larger objective is to build the long-term foundations that enable companies to leverage AI strategically, sustainably, and responsibly.”

Sabir Mardanov, Head of Data & AI, Azercell Telecom

“Looking from the perspective of a practitioner who has been implementing AI solutions for many years — long before GenAI, going back to early deep learning and even traditional machine learning — I’ve found that the universal formula for success remains remarkably consistent. The key strategic enablers are always the same: strong executive leadership, a clear product-driven mindset, repeatable and reusable data foundations, and production-grade, robust platforms. To me, this is the essential bundle required for meaningful progress. Once these elements are in place, everything else — talent, change management, compliance, measurement — can align behind them. These are the factors that truly help organizations move beyond pilot projects and scale AI use cases effectively across the enterprise.”

Ryan Wang, Co-founder and General Partner of Outpost Capital, Managing Partner at Solaris Venture Partners

“In the short term, we’re seeing billions of dollars flow into AI — from both venture capital and infrastructure investment. Whether these numbers are ultimately justified is still a question, especially since so much capital is chasing a limited number of high-quality companies. Valuations reflect this: firms like Figure AI, still pre-product and pre-revenue, are already valued at around \$40 billion. We’re also seeing the rise of “day-one unicorns. However, when we look at a slightly longer horizon—two to three years—the picture changes. The explosive adoption of technologies like ChatGPT, which reached 100 million daily active users within six months, shows how fast AI startups can scale. This acceleration in user growth and product development suggests that today’s massive investments may indeed be justified. Given the current momentum and the hyper-growth potential of AI companies, it’s reasonable to expect many of these investments to pay off — provided investors remain patient.”

Panel discussion | Inclusive Digitalization of Central Eurasia: How Can Nations Complement Big Tech in Building Digital Sovereignty?



Zixin Lin, Regional Lead for Central Asia and South Caucasus region, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change

“Sovereignty and control are not the same thing. What matters is knowing which parts of the technology stack — compute, data, models, applications, energy, talent — Eurasian nations can realistically control or steer, and where it is wiser to depend deliberately on partnerships, to maximize strategic latitude. Strategic interdependence doesn’t mean giving up control; countries can diversify partners, embed portability rights in contracts, and require real investment in knowledge, tech and skills transfer to grow domestic ecosystems.

Eurasia’s unique geostrategic position already makes it a corridor for goods and talent. It can also position itself as a digital corridor with closer cooperation so that partners see the region as a bloc and not fragmented mid-sized markets. Clear, consistent regulations across the region will attract partners by reducing uncertainty and risk, and creating scale. They also strengthen nations’ bargaining power. In parallel, the region must shape its own rules. Most AI and data governance frameworks today are written in Western Europe and North America. Eurasia can and must define principles suited to its own context. Africa’s sandboxes and ASEAN’s cross-border frameworks offer some inspiration.”

Temur Khisamutdinov, Director of the IT Park Dushanbe under the Agency for Innovation and Digital Technologies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan

“The countries in the region are developing along different paths. When we talk about sovereignty, it should not be

confused with isolation; sovereignty is not about cutting ourselves off. Rather, digital sovereignty should mean balanced partnerships and shared growth. In Tajikistan, for example, we view digital sovereignty as a collaborative process: we work with major tech companies to develop local talent, strengthen data infrastructure, and nurture an innovation ecosystem. We engage with big tech as active partners — never as passive users. Although we may not yet host large R&D centers, we are building the foundations for deeper collaboration and gradually moving from an outsourcing model toward homegrown innovation.”

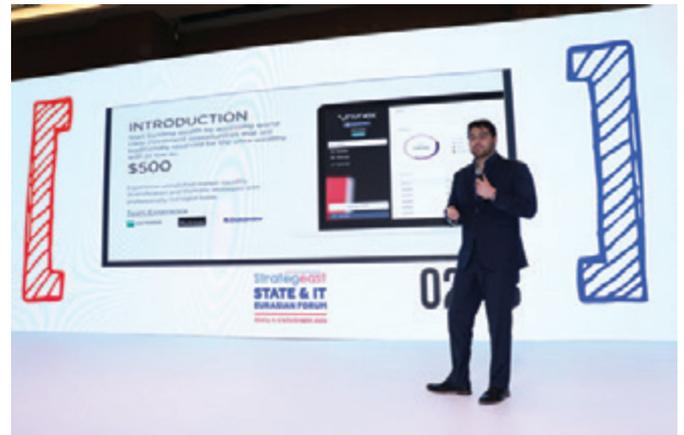
Chubak Temirov, Deputy Director, High Technology Park of the Kyrgyz Republic

“Speaking of the public-private partnership model in Kyrgyzstan — government, private sector, and academia often act independently, which makes it difficult to generate real value. As the High Technology Park, we are working to bridge these gaps by aligning stakeholders around shared goals. We are helping the government update its roadmap by incorporating private-sector priorities, and we are encouraging universities to create tech parks so they can collaborate more closely with industry. Today, academia and the private sector operate in different realities, and universities have largely lost sight of their role in preparing specialists for the market — one of the country’s biggest challenges. While there is no simple solution, we are launching several initiatives aimed at bringing these sectors together so they can ultimately function as a more unified ecosystem.”

Kamran Aghayev, Head of Data Management Department, IDDA

“Digital sovereignty refers to a state’s ability to maintain control over its data, its digital infrastructure, the technologies it uses, and the digital identities of its citizens. Azerbaijan actively collaborates with major global technology companies, and we have extensive partnerships with them. However, these collaborations are conducted in a locally managed and fully sovereign environment. By “sovereign environment,” I am referring in particular to the Government Cloud (G-Cloud) which was approved and signed into law by the President of Azerbaijan in 2019. Through G-Cloud, we work with global tech companies, use their platforms, and benefit from their products, while ensuring that all data and digital operations remain under national jurisdiction and securely managed within Azerbaijan’s sovereign digital ecosystem.”

Special side event | Startups Meet Investors



Cliona Jordan, Early Stage Startup Lead, Google

"I'd like to highlight Azerbaijan's remarkable human capital. First, the demographic profile is a major advantage: a young population that is highly adaptable, digitally fluent, and quick to embrace new technologies. Second, having a market of 10.5 million people gives you an ideal environment to test, scale, and refine products — essentially, a perfect innovation lab. Another strength is the country's linguistic diversity. Operating across four languages naturally builds bicultural and cross-cultural fluency, which extends beyond communication to a strong understanding of both Western and Eastern business practices. This ability to bridge different worlds is a true competitive edge. One of the qualities that struck me most is hospitality. If you channel that same spirit into your businesses, particularly in customer experience and service, it will set you apart. Finally, what I admire most in emerging markets is resilience. When challenges arise, you tackle them head-on. Unlike organizations that may have become complacent over time, you demonstrate an impressive capacity to adapt, persevere, and innovate."

Samir Hamidov, National Program Manager for EBRD's Advice to Small Business Programme in Azerbaijan

"EBRD Start Venture program is designed to support startup development and is currently active in 26 markets. Through Start Venture, participating startups receive a

comprehensive business diagnostic. Selected startups are then provided with up to €50,000 to cover training, mentorship, and advisory services of their choice — whether local or international. Advisory support can include IT development, marketing, organizational development, and more, all fully funded within the program limit. Startups also gain access to world-class mentors, opportunities to pitch at major events and demo days, and tailored support for fundraising activities. To date, the combined valuation of Start Venture portfolio companies has reached nearly US\$4 billion, with more than 600 advisory projects implemented."



Judges: Amy Peck, Founder & CEO, EndeavorXR; Ryan Wang, Co-founder and General Partner of Outpost Capital, Managing Partner at Solaris Venture; Fabio La Franca, Founder and Managing Partner of Blueverse; Masud Alisoy, Investment Associate, SABAH.fund; Abdulla Al-Naimi, Managing Director Doha Business Consulting; Ilkay Demirdag, Co-Founder & Co-CEO, Energy Shift Capital

StrategEast.trends: Deepfakes, Trust, and the Battle for Reality



Mohammed Ridwan, Co-founder & CEO, Pluto

“One key trend in today’s “battle for reality” is how rapidly deepfakes are evolving. We often think of deepfakes as manipulated images, videos or audio clips we encounter on social media, but the technology now extends far beyond that. In 2023, there were roughly half a million deepfake items online; by 2025, that number has surged to an estimated 8.5 million. This exponential rise poses serious risks for governments, institutions, and the public.

Although deepfake detection tools exist, they face fundamental limitations. Deepfake generation can theoretically get infinitely close to reality, while detection has no such upper bound — making it inherently impossible to stay fully ahead. Detection technologies will always function like antivirus software: useful, but perpetually one step behind. What we are seeing, however, is the emergence of innovative policy approaches and government actions aimed at addressing these risks more systematically.”

Panel discussion | The Rise of the Azerbaijani IT Sector: From Natural Resources to Algorithms



Valery Krasovsky, CEO and Co-Founder, Sigma Software Group

“Many large companies — especially in oil & gas and fintech — are facing increasingly complex challenges. Direct conversations with these clients make it clear where the market still lacks solutions and where new opportunities emerge.

At the same time, we are witnessing a major shift in the service industry: no one wants to build products from scratch anymore. With countless platforms and ready-made components available, businesses focus on reducing investment costs and choosing solutions that create immediate value. This is why we use product-based and platform approaches. They ensure faster implementation, better scalability, and a clear return on investment — exactly what companies need in today’s environment.”

Fidan Mirzayeva, Innovation Specialist at PASHA Holding

“When talking about the technological shift, I believe we should start by analyzing the market itself and identifying the key problems that need to be addressed in order to develop effective solutions. Also, important point is about investing in startups.”

Dr. Fuad Karimov, Regional Managing Director, Xsolla, Azerbaijan

“One of our key missions in the region is figuring out how to integrate local teams into global network effectively. We’ve run an incubation program, and many local studios have developed strong products. But having a good product and knowing how to market it are two very different things. These teams have talented, passionate artists, yet once they meet investors, it becomes clear they often need additional support. That’s why several stages of the incubation program focus on helping them understand monetization —because without it, a promising project remains just a hobby. The studios want to build real businesses, and we already have a few success stories, including several that reached seven-digit revenue this year. The first part of our work is strengthening existing studios through incubation. The second is taking these teams to major global industry events and giving them the knowledge they need to pitch, promote, and scale their products.”

Panel discussion | AI Policy Framework Between Sovereignty and Standards



Ana Chirita, Strategic Projects Director at ATIC and Program Lead for Tekwill

“A brief background is important when discussing sovereignty and standards, especially in the context of the AI era and how these issues relate to today’s reality. We see countries that are succeeding, which continue to lead in AI according to multiple assessments, including those cited by ChatGPT. At the same time, there may be strong, less visible advancements in several European countries. Denmark, for example, is making significant progress in the private sector, while France, the United Kingdom, and others are emerging as leaders in developing strong innovation ecosystems.”

Levan Darsalia, Deputy Chairman at Georgia’s Innovation & Technology Agency

“I believe that Georgia interprets AI sovereignty much like most other countries do. The global landscape is such that two countries — the United States and China — control the majority of infrastructure and leading AI models. As a result, everyone else is, to some extent, dependent on these two major players. For Georgia, AI sovereignty means ensuring that we remain up to date with global developments. Both the public and private sectors must keep pace with technological progress, and we must equip ourselves with the capabilities needed to be as self-sufficient as possible. This includes building domestic infrastructure, attracting, training, and retaining talent, and fostering a broad understanding of AI across Georgian society. Our national strategy, which is currently under development, places significant emphasis on AI education as well as upskilling and reskilling the entire population.”

Peter Bilyk, Member of the Expert Committee on AI development in Ukraine under the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine

“For Ukraine, AI sovereignty is not about isolation—it is about resilient interdependence. Our goal is to protect the state and society under Russian attack, safeguard the information space from propaganda, and strengthen

national stability. The war accelerated Ukraine’s digital transformation from a years-long effort into one achieved within months, driving our ambition to become a leading country in public-sector AI by 2026.

Our approach is built on three pillars: transforming government into a fully digital state, scaling AI-driven public services, and developing resilient digital infrastructure. We are currently building a national data-processing center and developing a Ukrainian large language model. We have also launched the first government AI agent capable of providing real government services. Ukraine continues to advance dual-use and defense technologies, including tools created by private companies during the invasion to detect disinformation and online manipulation. At the same time, we are aligning with European AI standards, having signed the first international AI convention on protecting human rights. Our goal is to ensure that AI strengthens national security, protects citizens, and opens new opportunities for using this transformative technology.”

Alexandru Gozun, AmCham Moldova President, Director PwC Moldova

“When defining sovereignty — not academically, but practically — I would say it is not about doing everything independently, but about having the ability to choose your standards, your models, your partners, and your implementation architecture. This is the lens through which we should view sovereignty for countries like Moldova. Ultimately, this is a governance question. When each ministry or agency begins developing its own tools, models, pilots, provider networks, and interpretations of compliance, the outcome is not sovereignty — it is fragmentation and chaos. Sovereignty becomes attainable only when strong governance and coordination mechanisms are in place, especially in areas such as data governance, risk assessment, and implementation frameworks. With coherent oversight, standards do not clash; they work together to support a unified national approach. This is what will allow Moldova to embrace new technologies in a way that is coherent, secure, and aligned with the country’s scale and strategic priorities.”

Panel discussion | Middle East, Central Asia, Caucasus as a Single Digital Market



Kate Bunina, Director, Silicon Foundry, Qatar

“We can clearly see the success in the UAE and how effectively it operates within the digital economy. I should also mention that the example where ministries submit challenges and startups or the public propose solutions — was successfully implemented by the government in the Czech Republic as well, ultimately leading to the creation of a standalone NGO to continue the work. I would love to see similar initiatives adopted in Central Asia.”



Ibrahim Nasibov, Country Representative at White Hill Capital

“Being a Central Asia-based fund, when we invested in startups, we quickly saw that the regional market is not very scalable. To grow, startups must expand abroad. Europe is highly regulated, the U.S. is extremely competitive, and Southeast Asia is culturally distant from Central Asia. That’s why the GCC has become the most promising destination. This year, we began helping Central Asian startups enter GCC markets through acceleration programs, providing soft-landing support, mentorship, and warm introductions to investors, corporations, and major holdings. Our partnership highlights an important point: Central Asian (and Caucasus) governments must actively drive these



efforts. Without government initiative, even strong private-sector programs struggle to achieve meaningful results.”

Walid Tarabih, Founder of Relik & PlatX

“The UAE is introducing several initiatives to stimulate the startup ecosystem. The goal is not just branding but creating real, low-barrier access for startups to enter the market. This includes programs which help startups pilot solutions directly with government entities. This approach is significant because traditional government procurement systems are often inaccessible to startups due to long payment terms, performance bonds, and other requirements they cannot meet. This effectively blocks startups from accessing up to 90% of the local market, since government spending dominates the economy. In contrast, the UAE model brings startups into challenge-based collaborations with government agencies. A startup with a relevant solution is matched with a government entity under an MoU, and they work together for 10 weeks to solve a specific problem. If the startup delivers results, the pilot becomes a full contract. This gives the startup its first major client, a government reference, proven product-market fit, and the momentum to scale and offer its solution to other public-sector entities.”

Khalid Al Tattan, Founder and Managing Partner, Leaders Lane

“If we look at the main advantages of Eurasian countries, the region stands out for its strong technical talent. But beyond that, there are challenges we need to address to create real cross-border synergies and scale toward the GCC.

One of the reasons GCC capital is cautious at the early stage is the relatively young startup ecosystems in places like Azerbaijan. But this also creates major opportunities once startups move beyond the initial funding rounds. For example, when a Baku-based startup wants to expand into the GCC, we treat the GCC as one integrated



market and leverage each country's strengths. A common pathway is to use Bahrain as the entry point: the company sets up there to benefit from talent access, a supportive regulatory environment, and government incentives. Once established, we use the Bahrain–Saudi frameworks to scale the startup efficiently into Saudi Arabia while keeping costs low through available subsidies. The next step is to build cross-border investment synergies — joint funds that bring together GCC and Eurasian investors to support scalable, high-growth companies across both regions.”

Similarly, the GCC’s expertise and innovation ecosystem align well with Central Eurasia’s rapidly developing startup landscape and expanding technological capabilities. And while the Gulf offers advanced policy frameworks, many Central Eurasian countries are now undertaking significant reforms that further strengthen the partnership potential.”



Yasser Biaz, CEO-founder, Global Cyber Partners

“The discussion often focuses on how to attract GCC investment into Central Eurasia by highlighting the region’s strengths. But the relationship is far more reciprocal. On the GCC side, there is capital, global know-how, advanced regulatory frameworks, and a clear vision driven by economic diversification. Central Eurasia can match this with its deep STEM foundation rooted in the Soviet academic tradition, ongoing infrastructure modernization, growing connectivity — including physical and fiber networks — and strong energy capacity to support large investments.



Panel discussion | Digital Literacy and Skills in the Public Sector



Lika Merabishvili, Regional Director for Caucasus, StrategEast

“Cooperation is essential. I have spent more than half of my life working within the education system, and it is clear that shared responsibility is needed — not only from universities, but also from the government and the business sector. As I mentioned, when we implemented a project here, it involved much more than education: it also included the employment process, with active participation from businesses. Financial institutions that funded the program also played a crucial role.”

Emilya Ahmadova, Head of the Innovation and Research Center at Baku Higher Oil School, SOCAR

“In bringing AI technologies into the industry, our success comes from placing innovation at the core of the School’s mission. We have developed strong internal cooperation between key departments — the Innovation Center, Career Center, and International Relations — which work closely together to engage with industry partners. This coordinated approach has proven essential, and I would be glad to share our experience in making these collaborations effective.”

Inara Valiyeva, Advisor to the Chairperson, Baku Metropolitan

“Many countries already have experience with government programs that subsidize or provide tax incentives to companies investing in human-capital development. Such support is essential, because HR leaders and CEOs constantly face the question of how much they should spend on upskilling. Given the rapid pace at which employees’ knowledge becomes outdated, continuous learning is critical. Governments should therefore motivate companies through incentives and targeted programs, ensuring that the workforce can update its skills quickly and remain competitive.”



Aziza Vidadi, Head of the Analysis and Monitoring Department, Center for Analysis and Coordination of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

“International research on digital transformation shows that while 97% of organizations pursuing digital transformation succeed only in implementing isolated use cases, just 3% achieve full transformation — including changes across their entire ecosystem. Many small, medium, and even large enterprises face significant financial and human-resource barriers when adopting AI. To overcome these challenges, approaches such as public–private partnerships can play a critical role in supporting companies on their AI adoption journey.”



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Highlights

- The 7th Stratageast State and IT Eurasian Forum took place in Baku, Azerbaijan. Under the theme "Shaping the World with AI", the Forum served as the first regional platform fully dedicated to examining how artificial intelligence is transforming industries, governance, and global collaboration.
- The Forum served as a catalyst for accelerating technological innovation, fostering collaboration, and bridging the region with global AI advancements. With its vibrant mix of industry leaders, policymakers, and academic luminaries, the Forum is poised to ignite a new era of technological progress for Central Eurasia and its neighbors.
- With a focus on innovation, ethics, and transformative potential, the event gathered some of the most renowned AI visionaries from Silicon Valley and other global innovation hubs. Their insights and expertise inspired dialogue and shape a shared vision for how AI can redefine industries, societies, and global cooperation.
- The Forum featured an impressive lineup of speakers from the United States, Europe, the Gulf States, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. This diverse representation ensured a rich exchange of ideas and insights from across the globe, fostering a collaborative environment for addressing the challenges and opportunities in the tech industry.
- Panel discussions explored the most urgent questions at the intersection of technology, policy, and society in an AI-driven world. Topics ranged from global IT trends and the rise of the AI economy, to inclusive digitalization across Central Eurasia, the regulation of artificial intelligence, and the emergence of a unified digital market spanning the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.
- A particular focus was placed on creating new employment opportunities within cutting-edge industries, reflecting the Forum's commitment to empowering individuals and communities through technological advancement.

StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum

The StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum is held annually in different countries of the Eurasian region.

The Annual StrategEast State and IT Eurasian Forum is a unique platform that brings together global and local representatives of the private sector, governments, and financial institutions. The Forum provides a unique opportunity to discuss what needs to be done in order to enhance the innovative economy across the region and assist the Eurasian countries with integration into the global economic and security system.

- **Over 70 high-level speakers**
- **Over 200 participants**
- **Over 30 global and regional institutional partners**

About StrategEast

StrategEast is a leading independent institution developing Eurasian digital economy, in collaboration with international financial institutions, development agencies, global tech companies, and Eurasian governments.

StrategEast is a non-profit organization with offices in the United States, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine.



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